

Fairfield Ledger
Fairfield, IA
Circ. 3225
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42728



Iowa Great Places initiative subject of Fairfield meeting

By ERIK GABLE
Ledger assistant news editor

On the Web

□ Iowa Great Places Initiative:
<http://www.iowagreatplaces.gov>

"In order to be prosperous and vigorous," Iowa director of cultural affairs Anita Walker said Monday night, "we must have a good quality of life."

Walker was describing the theory behind the state's new Iowa Great Places initiative, which will coach communities to develop and showcase their unique assets. She discussed the program during an open forum at the Fairfield Public Library.

Three pilot locations will be chosen for the Great Places initiative, Walker said. Coaches will work with people in each of those places to connect them with state resources that can help them promote their communities.

Walker reviewed some of the state resources that are available for community improvement and promotion.

For example, she said, the Legislature has set aside \$40 million worth of historic preservation tax credits for communities that create certified cultural districts.

Walker said a wide range of state agencies are helping with the Great Places initiative — even the Iowa Alcoholic Beverages Division, which is willing to turn its trucks into moving billboards to promote Great Places locations.

A great place, Walker said, is a place "where all members of the community can intersect and engage and feel comfortable." It's a place with a vital, diverse economy where people can pursue all kinds of different careers, she said, and

where people are open to creative new ideas. It's a place with a pleasing environment, and one where people can have good experiences in addition to just looking at the scenery.

Walker said communities need to look at the face they present to visitors, asking whether it's attractive or whether "you feel like you're coming in through the back door." She said great places should look like the people who live there have pride in their community.

Education is another key, Walker said, adding that "young people and families aren't going to want to live there unless they feel like their children can get a quality education."

In choosing the three pilot projects for the Great Places initiative, Walker said, the state will look for strong local involvement and broad community support, including "some of the voices that don't typically get invited to the table" — not just the people who normally deal with economic development issues such as the mayor, city council and chamber of commerce.

She also said the Great Places initiative is designed for places where it can achieve "clear, quick results."

Following Walker's presentation, several community members presented ideas for Great Places proposals.

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GREAT PLACES

Burt Chojnowski began by discussing a plan to showcase the Loudon Machinery Company, an early Fairfield manufacturer that was responsible for a number of innovations in agriculture. Mark Shafer discussed plans to use the three Loudon-designed barns on the Maasdam farmstead south of town as a museum, as well as the possibility of hiring a curator who would coordinate exhibits between the barns and the Carnegie museum in town. Chojnowski also talked about the possibility of getting local artists to paint the sides of other barns in town, comparing the idea to one implemented in Adams County, Ohio, in which barns are painted with quilt squares.

Chojnowski's second suggestion was for a plan to develop a business cluster for the new digital media industry. He said new digital media, such as "surround video" technology, could establish the Fairfield area as a technology center similar to Silicon Valley.

David Theobodo discussed the New Chicago neighborhood and his plans for a hotel and commercial area near the Broadway Building.

Deborah Williamson talked about plans for a Fairfield cultural district.

Lonnie Gamble discussed plans an internship project in sustainable living.

Applications for the Iowa Great Places initiative — or invitations, as the state is calling them — are due July 1.

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